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### ZPRAVODAJSKÁ STRATEGIE JAKO PROSTŘEDEK NÁZOROVÉHO UTVÁŘENÍ: POROVNÁNÍ MEDIÁLNÍ REPREZENTACE BARACKA OBAMY NEWS STRATEGY AS A MEANS OF OPINION FORMATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF BARACK OBAMA

**Bakalářská práce:** *II-FP-KAJ- 0017*

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## Čestné prohlášení

**Název práce:** Zpravodajská strategie jako prostředek názorového utváření:  
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**Anotace:**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá komparativní analýzou mediální reprezentace prezidenta Spojených států amerických, Baracka Obamy. Srovnávány jsou články pocházející z amerických a islámských zpravodajských médií. Jelikož tyto mediální články vznikly ve dvou různých prostředích, které se liší svým politickým, kulturním a náboženským založením, předpokládá se, že tyto ideologické odlišnosti se také odrážejí v jejich reprezentaci amerického prezidenta. Samotný proces utváření zpravodajského diskurzu odhaluje, že je konečná reprezentace Obamy ovlivněna především institucemi, které stojí za danými zpravodajskými agenturami.

**Klíčová slova:** média, zprávy, reprezentace, Barack Obama, ideologie, instituce, zpravodajská agentura.

**Annotation:**

This bachelor thesis deals with the comparative analysis of the representation of the U.S. president, Barack Obama, in the American and Islamic news media. Since the analyzed news stories come from two diverse political, cultural and religious backgrounds, the media representation of Barack Obama is expected to mirror their ideologically-based differences. Moreover, the production process of news discourse reveals that it is mainly the institutional background of the news agencies that determines the representation and final picture of Obama.

**Key words:** media, news, representation, Barack Obama, ideology, institution, news agency.

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# 1 Introduction

Politics and relations among individuals in societies across the world are being transformed by new technologies for targeting individuals and sophisticated methods for shaping personalized messages. The new technologies challenge boundaries of many kinds—between news, information, entertainment, and advertising; between media, with the arrival of the World Wide Web; and even between nations (Norris, 2003, ix). This technological process of providing media messages largely determines and reinforces public perceptions. In order to learn what strategy is behind this complex media process, it is crucial to look behind the obvious and think about media messages that we receive in a more critical way.

The objective of this paper is to analyze the news representation of Barack Obama presented on one hand by American, and on the other by Islamic news media. The news representation of the American president is analyzed in the context of a prominent world event: the demise of the former leader of al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden. The political, and hence, the media significance of such an event is obvious, and the event was presented by most of the international newspapers and their online servers. The death of a key figure of a global militant group al-Qaeda, therefore, not only led to widespread media coverage but also possibly to varying political and ideological interpretations and representations of the event itself and the important actor of this news event, Barack Obama. However, we will target only at the news coverages coming from the American and Islamic online news servers.

The methodology of discourse analysis will be applied in this study in order to discover possible ideological and political differences in the news accounts coming from

two culturally diverse backgrounds. This qualitatively based discourse analysis discusses the respective levels and dimensions of the structures of news reports. An account is given to the thematic structures, stylistic and rhetorical structures of the news reports. These various structures of the news are systematically related to the cognitive and social conditions of news productions, as well as to the processes of understanding by the readers. At several level, the ideological dimensions of news structures are being analyzed. The production process of the news is analyzed with the special focus on the institutional background of the American and Islamic news agencies that produced the chosen news stories. Finally, the attention is also paid to the constraints of comprehension process of the news based on the theories of Marshall McLuhan and Umberto Eco.

What is suggested is that the news representation of Barack Obama in the American news coverages will not be the same as his news representation in the Islamic news stories. We can expect that the American media will portrait Obama in a more favorable way and might even explicitly support his presidential image while the Islamic media might express more critical or even disapproving attitude towards him and the whole news event since they come from a different ideological background.

## 2 Media

Nowadays people are in everyday contact with media of all kinds. For instance, we experience them by turning on the radio while waking up, clicking on the Web to catch the latest world news or before heading off to work by checking our email on the Internet. They are with us even during a routine activity such as breakfast when we eagerly turn on the television to catch a few minutes of the morning news shows, or on the subway to work while listening to iPod. It is obvious that in a very brief time span we can be immersed in the world of media. Very broadly, that world includes radio, Internet, newspapers, magazines, and outdoor billboards. Nevertheless, by using media we not only select satellite radio to listen to music, the Internet to see the latest news, or the television to watch a program, but we also receive information through a means of communication, or a *medium* (Katz 2010, 1).

The media play a very important role in our lives. As Marshal McLuhan says, “the medium, or process, of our time—electric technology—is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life.” It is forcing us to reconsider and reevaluate practically every thought, every action, and every institution formerly taken for granted. Everything is changing—you, your family, your neighborhood, your education, your job, your government, your relation to “the others”. And they are changing dramatically (McLuhan 1967, 8).

Media help fulfill two basic needs—they inform and they entertain. We turn to the media when we want to hear the latest world news or what happened in financial markets, for instance. We also look to the media to fill our evening and weekends with escapist fare to get us out of our everyday routine. So television entertain us with movies, dramas



comedies, reality shows, and sports. Radio offers us a wide variety of music, talk and entertainment to listen to. We turn to magazines to find out more about our favorite hobbies and interest. Newspapers help us keep up with the world around us. And the Internet provides limitless information and a means of shared entertainment and communication (Katz 2010, 2).

Historically, the world of media was broadly divided into two types—print and electronic. Print media included magazines and newspapers, while electronic media covered radio, television and the Internet. Other media types are not quite so easily categorized. Thus, outdoor billboards and generally defined as a print medium, while out of home options such as transit ads, or stadium signage, are variously classified as non-traditional, alternative, or ambient media.

In today's ever-changing media world, however, these distinctions are fast becoming out of date. What is increasingly distinguishing one media type from another is how much consumer control there is in this medium's use. Magazines and newspapers have always been under their readers' control; after all, they choose what to read. Regular TV, on the other hand, is more passive; the networks decide what programs to air, and when. But now, with technologies such as digital video recorders, it is the viewer who has become the program scheduler, controlling what he wants to see, and when (Katz 2010, 3).

## **2.1 New Media**

Media studies textbooks usually distinguish media (mass media, to be precise) from other forms of communication that have been developed over the years. This allows us to distinguish communication technologies, such as the telephone, from mass media, in

which communication is unidirectional, such as the television. However, the emergence of the Internet and other interactive media networks have forced us to reconsider our concepts of media (Giles 2003, 6).

To begin with, “new media is a broad term in media studies that appeared in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to encompass the amalgamation of traditional media such as film, images, music, spoken and written word, with the interactive power of computer and communications technology, computer-enabled consumer devices and most importantly the Internet” (Kayye 2010). Moreover, it is the Internet that will be the main source of media reports in my research.

There are many promises related to the term “new media”. To illustrate, new media offer us a possibility of on-demand access to content any time, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation and community formation around the media content. Another significant promise of new media is the “democratization” of the creation, distribution, publishing and consumption of media content.

And what actually distinguishes new media from traditional media is the digitizing of content into bits which is digital, easily manipulated, networkable, compressible and interactive. To point out, new media is not television programs, feature films, magazines, books or paper-based publications – unless they contain technologies that enable digital interactivity, such as graphic tags containing web-links (Kayye 2010).

## **2.2 “*The Medium Is the Message*”**

According to Marshall McLuhan, perhaps the most famous of all media scholars, each new medium shapes society by its own terms, so we can never have a universal

definition of “media”—the concept is forever in a state of flux. He casts the net as wide as possible by defining a medium as an “extension of ourselves”(1964, 11), using electric light as an example. Media are effectively ciphers (i.e., empty of meaning) until we perceive some form of content, which is then treated as message. The electric light is devoid of content until it is used to convey an explicit message, such as an advertising slogan or brand name, or until we credit it with a particular meaning (such as “light pollution”). From such reasoning came McLuhan's much-quoted expression, “The medium is the message.” (Giles 2003, 7).

First of all, it is essential to understand what McLuhan means by saying that “The medium is the message”. McLuhan says that a “message” is, “the change of scale or pace or pattern” that a new invention or innovation “introduces into human affairs” (1995, 148). Note that it is not the content or use of the innovation, but the change in inter-personal dynamics that the innovation brings with it. Thus, the message of theatrical production is not the musical or the play being produced, but perhaps the change in tourism that the production may encourage. Similarly, the message of a newscast are not the news stories themselves, but a change in the public attitude towards crime, or the creation of a climate of fear. A McLuhan message always tells us to look beyond the obvious and seek the non-obvious changes or effects that are enabled, enhanced, accelerated or extended by the new thing.

McLuhan defines medium as well. Right at the beginning of *Understanding Media*, he claims that a medium is “any extension of ourselves”. Classically, he suggests that a hammer extends our arm and that the wheel extends our legs and feet. Each enables us to do more than our bodies could do on their own. A microscope, or telescope is a way of seeing that is an extension of the eye. Considering more complicated extensions, one

might think of the automobile as an extension of the feet. It allows man to travel places in the same manner as the feet, only faster and with less effort. In addition, this extension enables one to travel in relative comfort in extreme weather conditions. But McLuhan always thought of a medium in the sense of a growing medium, like the fertile potting soil into which a seed is planted. In other words, a medium—this extension of our body or senses or mind—is anything from which a change emerges. And since some sort of change emerges from everything we conceive or create, all of our inventions, innovations, ideas and ideals are McLuhan's media.

Thus we have the meaning of “the medium is the message” so we can know the nature and characteristics of anything we conceive or create (medium) by virtue of the changes—often unnoticed and non-obvious changes that effect us (message). McLuhan warns that we are often distracted by the content of a medium (which, in almost all cases, is another distinct medium in itself). He says, “it is only too typical that the content of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium” (McLuhan 1995, 150). And it is the character of the medium that is its potency or effect—its message. He talks about the electric light to prove his point (Federman 2004).

He claims that the electric light is pure information. It is a medium without a message, as it were, unless it is used to spell out some verbal ad or name. This fact, characteristic of all media, means that the “content” of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph. If it is asked, “What is the content of speech?” it is necessary to say, “It is an actual process of thought, which is in itself nonverbal.” An abstract painting represents direct manifestation of creative thought processes as they might appear in computer designs. What McLuhan considers here, however, are the

psychic and social consequences of the designs or patterns as they amplify or accelerate existing process. For the “message” of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs. The railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure (1995, 148).

Now let's return to the electric light. Whether the light is being used for brain surgery or night baseball is a matter of indifference. It could be argued that these activities are in some way the “content” of the electric light, since they could not exist without the electric light. This fact merely underlines the point that “the medium is the message” because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. The content of uses of such media are as diverse as they are ineffectual in shaping the form of human association. As I have already mentioned, it is only too typical that the “content” of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium.

As McLuhan says, the electric light escapes attention as a communication medium just because it has no “content.” And this makes it an invaluable instance of how people fail to study media at all. For it is not till the electric light is used to spell out some brand name that it is noticed as a medium. Then it is not the light but the “content” (or what is really another medium) that is noticed. The message of the electric light is like the message of electric power in industry, totally radical, pervasive, and decentralized. For electric light and power are separate from their uses, yet they eliminate time and space factors in human association exactly as do radio, telegraph, telephone, and TV, creating involvement in depth (1995, 149).

However, the McLuhan's theory that the medium is the message has its critics as well. One of them is Umberto Eco (1998, 138) claiming it is untrue that acting on the form and content of the message can convert the person receiving it. For the receiver of the message seems to have a residual freedom: the freedom to read it in a different way (as Eco says, “different” and not “mistaken”).

Furthermore, to say that light is a medium is a refusal to realize that there are at least three definitions of “light”, Eco argues. Light can be a *Signal* of information (I use electricity to transmit impulses that, in Morse code, mean particular messages); light can be a *Message* (if a girlfriend puts a light in the window, it means her husband has gone out); and light can be a *Channel* (if I have the light on in my room I can read the message—book). In each of these cases the impact of a phenomenon on the social body varies according to the role it plays in the communication chain. In each of these three cases the meaning of the message changes according to the code with which I interpret it. The fact that light, when I use Morse code to transmit luminous signals, is a signal—and that this signal is light and not something else—has, on the Addressee, far less impact than the fact that the Addressee knows Morse code. If, for example, in the second of Eco's hypothetical cases, the girlfriend uses light as a signal to transmit in Morse code the message “my husband is home” but I continue to refer to our previously established code, whereby “light” means “husband absent,” my behavior (with all the ensuing unpleasant consequences) is determined not by the form of the message or its contents according to the Emitting Source but by the code I am using (Eco 1998, 139).

And so the communication chain outlined above will have to be modified as follows: The Receiver transforms the *Signal* into *Message*, but this message is still the empty form

to which the Addressee can attribute various meanings depending on the Code he applies to it (Eco 1998, 139).

Eco adds that the mass communication universe is full of discordant interpretations and variability of interpretation is the constant law of mass communication. The messages set out from the Source and arrive in distinct sociological situations, where different codes operate. To illustrate, for a Milanese bank clerk a TV ad for a refrigerator represents a stimulus to buy, but for an unemployed peasant in Calabria the same image means the confirmation of a world of prosperity that does not belong to him and that he must conquer. This is why, Eco believes, TV advertising in depressed countries functions as a revolutionary message (Eco 1998, 141).

The problem of mass communications is that until now this variability of interpretation has been random. Nobody regulates the way in which the addressee uses the message—except in a few rare cases. And here, even if we shift the problem, even if we say “the medium is not the message” but rather “the message depends on the code,” we do not solve the problem of the communications era. If the apocalyptic says, “The medium does not transmit ideologies: It itself is ideology; television is the form of communication that takes on the ideology of advanced industrial society,” we could now only reply: “The medium transmits those ideologies which the addressee receives according to codes originating in his social situation, in his previous education, and in the psychological tendencies of the moment.” In this case the phenomenon of mass communication would remain unchanged: There exists an extremely powerful instrument that none of us will ever manage to regulate; there exist means of communication that, unlike means of production, are not controllable either by private will or by the community. In confronting them, all of

us, from the head of CBS to the president of the United States, from Martin Heidegger to the poorest fellow of the Nile delta, all of us are the *proletariat* (Eco 1998, 141).

Yet, Eco believes there is a way of restoring to human beings a certain freedom in the face of the total phenomenon of Communication. He employs a strategic solution called a “guerrilla solution”. As he says, what must be occupied, in every part of the world, is the first chair in front of every TV set (and naturally, the chair of the group leader in front of every movie screen, every transistor, every page of newspaper). If one wants a less paradoxical formulation, Eco puts it like this: “The battle for the survival of man as a responsible being in the Communications Era is not to be won where the communication originates, but where it arrives.” Precisely when the communication systems envisage a single industrialized source and a single message that will reach an audience scattered all over the world, we should be capable of imagining systems of complementary communication that allow us to reach every individual human group, every individual member of the universal audience, to discuss the arriving message in the light of the codes at the destination, comparing them with the codes at the source. As Eco says, he is not proposing a new and more terrible form of control of public opinion. He is proposing an action to urge the audience to control the message and its multiple possibilities of interpretation (1998, 142–143).

Both McLuhan's and Eco's concepts offer me two different insights into what is a medium and message and how it can be received and understood by audience. Since the news coming from two unlike cultural backgrounds will be compared, Muslim and American, these concepts will help me realize possible differences in the news interpretation which I will further indicate in the latter analysis.



## **2.3 New Media and its Effects**

While there is no doubt that the printing press in the fourteen century and photography in the nineteenth century had a revolutionary impact on the development of modern society and culture, today we are in the middle of a new media revolution—the shift of all culture to computer-mediated forms of production, distribution, and communication. This new revolution is arguably more profound than the previous ones, and we are just beginning to register its initial effects. Indeed, the introduction of the printing press affected only one stage of cultural communication, the distribution of media. Similarly, the introduction of photography affected only one type of cultural communication—still images. On the contrary, the computer media revolution affects all stages of communication, including acquisition, manipulation, storage, and distribution; it also affects all types of media—texts, still images, moving images, and spacial constructions (Manovich 2001, 19).

Vilém Flusser describes a world fundamentally changed by the invention of the “technical image” and the mechanisms that support and define industrialized modern culture. He argues that whereas ideas were previously interpreted by written account, the invention of photography allows the creation of images (ideas) taken at face value as truth, not interpretation that can be endlessly replicated and spread worldwide.

Linguistic communication, both the spoken and written word, are no longer capable of transmitting the thoughts and concepts which we have concerning the world. New codes are being elaborated, and one of the most important codes is the code of technical images. As he says, “It is my firm belief, that if you want, nowadays, to have a clear and distinct communication of your concepts, you have to use synthetic image, no longer words, and

this is a veritable revolution in thinking.” He claims that images do not represent the world anymore. Those new images are now the articulation of thought. They are not copies, but projections, models, so a new attitude toward the image is necessary though he adds that people do not yet know how to handle the new apparatus.

Flusser explains, “Every revolution, be it political, economic, social, or aesthetic, is, in the last analysis, a technical revolution. If you look at the big revolutions through which mankind has gone, let's say the neolithic revolution, the revolution of bronze age, the iron age or the industrial revolution, every revolution is, in fact, the technical revolution. So is the present one. But there is one difference. So far, techniques have always simulated the body. For the first time, our new techniques simulate the nervous system. So that this is for the first time, a really, if you want to say so, a really immaterial, and, to use an old term, spiritual revolution” (Flusser 1988).

Umberto Eco's view of this issue is that we are living in the Age of Communication. Eco also refers to Professor McLuhan by saying that information is no longer an instrument for producing economic merchandise, but has itself become the chief merchandise. Communication has been transformed into heavy industry. Faced by the prospect of a communications network that expands to embrace the universe, every citizen of the world becomes a member of a new proletariat (Eco 1995, 135).

According to Neuman, “we are witnessing the evolution of a universal interconnected network of audio, video, and electronic text communications that will blur the distinction between interpersonal and mass communication and between public and private communication”. He also argues that new media significantly change the meaning of geographic distance (globalization), allow for a huge increase in the volume of communication, provide the possibility of increasing the speed of communication, provide

opportunities for interactive communication and allows forms of communication that were previously separate to overlap and interconnect.

Consequently, the scholar, Douglas Kellner argues that new media, and particularly the Internet, “provide the potential for a democratic postmodern public sphere, in which citizens can participate in well informed, non-hierarchical debate pertaining to their social structures” (Kellner 1995, 56).

Those who contradict the positive appraisals of the potential social impacts of new media are scholars such as Ed Herman and Robert McChesney suggesting that the transition to new media indicated a handful of powerful transnational telecommunications corporations who achieve a level of global influence which had been by that time beyond imagination (McChesney 2008, 122).

## ***2.4 New Media and Journalism***

It is obvious that journalism is undergoing a fundamental transformation, perhaps the most fundamental since the rise of the penny press of the mid-nineteenth century. In the twilight of the twentieth century and the dawn of the twenty-first, there is emerging a new form of journalism whose distinguishing qualities include ubiquitous news, global information access, instantaneous reporting, interactivity, multimedia content, and extreme content customization. In many ways this represents a potentially better form of journalism because it can reengage an increasingly distrusting and alienated audience. At the same time, it presents many threats to the most cherished values and standards of journalism. Authenticity of content, source verification, accuracy, and truth are all suspect in a medium where anyone with a computer and a modem can become a global publisher (Pavlik 2001,

13). As Stuart Allan says, to practice random acts of journalism, you do not need a big-league publication with a slick Website behind you. All you need is a computer, an Internet connection, and an ability to perform some of the tricks of the trade: report what you observe, analyze events in a meaningful way, but most of all, just be fair and tell the truth, as you and your sources see it (2004, 171).

According to Pavlik, new media are transforming journalism in four ways. First, the nature of news content is inexorably changing as a result of emerging new media technology. Second, the way journalists do their work is being retooled in the digital age. Third, the structure of the newsroom and news industry is undergoing a fundamental transformation. And, fourth, new media are bringing about a realignment of the relationships between and among news organizations, journalists, and their many publics, including audiences, sources, competitors, advertisers, and governments. He adds that developments in new media are giving rise to the development of new story telling techniques that engage the audience in more contextualized and navigable news reporting (e.g., text, images, video, graphics); nonlinear writing, or hypermedia (i.e., links); extraordinary customization; and heightened audience involvement. Moreover, news is becoming much more fluid. In the old world of analog media, a story was typically published by a newspaper or covered on the evening television news and then perhaps updated the next day. Today, news is in a constant state of flux. Updates are made continuously. When visiting a Web site, one of the first things a viewer checks is when the site was last updated and, if this has not occurred recently, we can move on to another site (2001, 15).

With regard to the structural implications of new media, online newsrooms tend to be increasingly decentralized and flexible, especially those that are original to the Internet, and

they reflect a more experimental and adaptable culture. Staffs are much more likely to include large numbers of freelance contributors. Although this gives the online newsroom an adaptable design, it also makes it more difficult to install and maintain a strong newsroom culture of traditional news values. In addition, the traditional news provider typically has served a well-defined geographic community. Local newspapers and local broadcasters served their local city, town suburb, or regional market. National news providers served primarily a single country or extended region. Today's online news operations may continue to serve local communities, but those that hope for eventual financial viability are retooling to serve much larger and geographically diverse communities of interest that may include local citizenry but also larger numbers who live well beyond the local or even national boundary. This shift brings with it profound implications not just for commerce and culture but for democracy, which in the United States has traditionally been based on geographic boundaries, with a corresponding news media system among whose primary responsibilities was the creation of a well-informed electorate (Pavlik 2001, 16).

Furthermore, Pavlik suggests that the changes in journalism are only beginning and that regulatory changes and emerging artificial intelligence tools will exert subtle but profound influences on the nature of journalism in the twenty-first century. Leadership must come from both the industry and the academy if the fourth estate—journalism—is to continue to serve democracy effectively (2001, 18).

## **2.5 Media Analysis**

In order to comprehend and embark on media analysis, it will be useful at this stage to consider what is meant by media output. This can be understood in relation to almost everything media producers and organizations put together for audiences: advertisements, magazines, newspapers, films, DVDs, television programs and comics are familiar, everyday examples of media texts. One way of talking about media output is in terms of the written and spoken narratives and stories and the audio-visual sounds and images—the texts in other words—which construct and represent a specific reality at a particular point in history. To analyze this output is one way of carrying out media analysis. Perhaps the main point concerning media analysis is that the analysis be understood not just in relation to the text (program, newspaper, magazine), but in the context of the society and history in which the media is produced (Purvis 2006, 6).

But media analysis and media analyst must also consider components of the mass media “outside” the frames of the texts. Audiences, or the readers, listeners and users of texts, not only interpret texts but also use media output and products in the ongoing (re)construction of everyday life. Thus, what audiences have to say about the texts, and what audiences “do” with output and products, will form a vital part of any media analysis. Without a sense of what the users think of media output, then media analysis remains textual analysis and, whilst important, it limits how the role of the media is understood in contemporary cultures (Purvis 2006, 7).

Media analysis is often performed by non-profit organizations and foundations which need to understand the media landscape in order to gain a thorough understanding of how to present their positions on critical issues (Gould 2004, 1). The great ability of this kind of

analysis is that it researches how high-quality coverage of political, economic, security, social, and cultural developments contributes to wider awareness and understanding of global issues. It can be used to identify messages, examine how those messages are framed, and see how existing coverage of an issue could be improved. This media research entails systematically taking a “slice” of media coverage from a set time-frame, often in the top daily newspapers, magazines and broadcast news outlets. The coverage can be classified and analyzed to identify communication opportunities for nonprofits and foundations, and strategic recommendations can be drawn to help them effectively disseminate their messages (Gould 2004, 1).

The media research that will be conducted, however, will work only with one section of the mass media—news media—focusing on presenting current news to the public. News media can be found in various forms, such as print media (newspapers, magazines); broadcast media (radio stations, television stations, television networks), and increasingly Internet-based media (World Wide Web pages, blogs). (Wikipedia, 2011). Yet, my news research will be primarily based on Internet news coverages presented by American and Islamic media servers. As I have mentioned, the question addressed in this study is whether news reports from different countries and regions of the world, and produced in different political and ideological contexts, would also provide equally variable types of description of a world event.

### **3 News as Discourse**

#### **A Discourse Approach to Media Analysis**

There is in fact a great diversity of scientific research devoted to describing the media, of which I shall mention the approach that will be directly applied in my paper and that is the critical discourse approach.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose and ultimately to resist social inequality.

Some of the tenets of CDA can already be found in the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School before the the Second World War. Its current focus on language and discourse was initiated with the “critical linguistics” that emerged at the end of the 1970s (van Dijk 1998, 1).

According to van Dijk, CDA is a field that is concerned with studying and analyzing written and spoken texts to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias. It shows how these discursive sources are maintained and reproduced within specific social, political and historical context. In a similar vein, Fairclough defines CDA as discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and text, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between



discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony (Sheyholislami 2001, 1).

Among Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) practitioners, van Dijk is one of the most often referenced and quoted in critical studies of media discourse, even in studies that do not necessarily fit within the CDA perspective. He integrates his general theory of discourse to the discourse of news in the press, and applies his theory to authentic cases of news reports at both the national and international level. What distinguishes van Dijk's framework for the analysis of news discourse is his call for a thorough analysis not only of the textual and structural level of media discourse but also for analysis and explanations at the production and reception or comprehension level (Sheyholislami 2001, 3).

Van Dijk essentially understands discourse analysis as ideology analysis, because according to him, “ideologies are typically, though not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication, including non-verbal semiotic messages, such as pictures, photographs and movies” (1995, 17).

### ***3.1 Ideological Discourse Analysis***

#### **What is ideology?**

Contrary to most traditional approaches, Teun A. van Dijk defines ideologies within a multidisciplinary framework that combines a social, cognitive and discursive component. As “system of ideas”, ideologies are sociocognitively defined as shared representations of social groups, and more specifically as “axiomatic” principles of such representations. As the basis of a social group's self-image, ideologies organize its identity, actions, aims, norms and values, resources as well as its relations to other social groups. In other words,

ideologies consist of social representations that define the social identity of a group, that is, its shared beliefs about its fundamental conditions and ways of existence and reproduction. Different *types* of ideologies are defined by the kind of groups that “have” an ideology, such as social movements, political parties, classes, or churches, among others (van Dijk 2006, 115–140).

Moreover, ideologies are not any kind of socially shared beliefs, such as sociocultural knowledge or social attitudes, but more fundamental or axiomatic. They control and organize other socially shared beliefs. Thus, a racist ideology may control attitudes about immigration, a feminist ideology may control attitudes about abortion or glass ceiling on the job or knowledge about gender inequality in society, and a social ideology may favor a more important role of the State in public affairs. Hence, ideologies are foundational social beliefs of a rather general and abstract nature. One of their cognitive functions is to provide (ideological) coherence to the belief of a group and thus facilitate their acquisition and use in everyday situations. Among other things, ideologies also specify what general cultural values (freedom, equality, justice, etc.) are relevant for the group. Next, as the sociocognitive foundation of social groups, ideologies are *gradually* acquired and (sometimes) changed through life or a life period, and hence need to be relatively *stable*. One does not become a pacifist, feminist, racist or socialist overnight, nor does one change one's basic ideological outlook in a few days. Many experiences and discourses are usually necessary to acquire or change ideologies. The often observed variability of ideological opinions of groups members, thus, should be accounted for at the personal or contextual level, and is no ground to reject the notion of a shared, stable group ideology (van Dijk 2006, 2).

Also the reverse is true: if ideologies can be gradually developed by (members of) a group, they also gradually disintegrate, e.g. when members no longer believe in a cause and “leave” the group.

Sometimes, ideologies become shared so widely that they seem to have become part of the generally accepted attitudes of an entire community, as obvious beliefs or opinion, or common sense. Thus, much of what today are widely accepted as social or human rights, such as many forms of gender equality, were and are ideological beliefs of the feminist or socialist movements. In that sense, and by definition, these beliefs thus lose their ideological nature as soon as they become part of the Common Ground (van Dijk 2006, 3).

### ***3.2 The Ideological Approach***

Ideological analysis of language and discourse is a widely practiced scholarly and critical endeavour in the humanities and the social sciences. The presupposition of such analysis is that ideologies of speakers or writers may be “uncovered” by close reading, understanding or systematic analysis, if language users explicitly or unwittingly “express” their ideologies through language and communication (van Dijk 2011, 1).

Despite these widespread practices and assumptions, however, the theory that relates discourse and these “underlying” ideologies is far from explicit. According to van Dijk, in discourse studies, as well as in cognitive and social psychology or the social sciences, we do not know much about how exactly ideologies are either developed by or through discourse, on the one hand, or how they control or otherwise influence text and talk, on the other hand. Therefore, he summarizes some theoretical assumptions, and discusses some

specific issues that have so far been ignored in the practice of ideological discourse analysis (Sheyholislami 2001, 1).

Van Dijk's approach for analyzing ideologies has three parts: social discourse analysis, cognitive analysis, and discourse analysis (van Dijk 1995, 30). Whereas the social analysis pertains to examining the “overall societal structures” (the context), the discourse analysis is primarily text based (syntax, lexicon, local semantics, topics, schematic structure). In this sense, van Dijk's approach incorporates the two traditional approaches in media education discussed earlier: interpretive (text based) and social tradition (context based), into one analytical framework for analyzing media discourse. However, what noticeably distinguishes van Dijk's approach from other approaches in CDA is another feature of his approach: cognitive analysis (Sheyholislami 2001, 4).

As van Dijk says, “discourse is a complex communicative event that embodies a social context, featuring participants (and their properties) as well as production and reception processes” (van Dijk 1988a, 16).

By “production processes” van Dijk means journalistic and institutional practices of news-making and the economic and social practices which not only play important roles in the creation of media discourse but which can be explicitly related to the structures of media discourse. Van Dijk's other dimension of analysis, “reception processes”, involves taking into consideration the comprehension, “memorization and reproduction” of news information. What his analysis of media attempts to demonstrate is the relationships between the three levels of news text production (structure, production and comprehension processes) and their relationship with the wider social context they are embedded within. In order to identify such relationships, van Dijk's analysis takes place at two levels: microstructures and macrostructures.

### **3.3 *Microstructures and Macrostructures***

At the microstructure level, analysis is focused on the semantic relations between propositions, syntactic, lexical and other rhetorical elements that provide coherence in the text, and other rhetorical elements such quotations, direct or indirect reporting that give factuality to the news reports. Central to van Dijk's analysis of news reports, however, is the analysis of macrostructures since it pertains to the thematic/topic structure of the news stories and their overall schemata.

Themes and topics are realized in the headlines and lead paragraphs. According to van Dijk, the headlines “define the overall coherence or semantic unity of discourse, and also what information readers memorize best from a news report”(1988, 248). He claims that the headline and the lead paragraph express the most important information of the cognitive model of journalists, that is, how they see and define the news event. Unless readers have different knowledge and beliefs, they will generally adopt these subjective media definitions of what is important information about an event (van Dijk 1988b, 48). Empirically speaking, meanings are assigned to texts in processes of interpretation by language users. They have a cognitive nature. The same is true for macrostructures. People assign a topic to a text, or infer it from a text, and these processes are a constituent part of understanding (van Dijk 1988b, 41).

Macrostructures and the cognitive operations in which they are used are crucial in news production processes by reporters and editors and for comprehension, storage, memorization, and later reproduction by media users. They explain how newsmakers continuously and routinely summarize the myriad of source texts (other media messages, wires, interviews, reports, or press conferences) that are used in the production of

a specific news report. Without a theory of macrostructures we would be unable to account for the special properties of headlines and leads, which subjectively summarize the rest of the news report. And finally, macrostructures explain why most readers usually only remember the main topics, that is, the higher levels of the macrostructures of a news report (van Dijk 1988a, 14).

In the same way that we need a syntactic form to express and organize the meaning of a sentence, we also need form to organize the overall meaning or macrostructures of a text as a whole. The schematic superstructure fulfills that need (van Dijk 1988a, 14). For van Dijk, the news schemata (“superstructures”) are structured according to a specific narrative pattern that consists of the following: *summary* (headline and the lead paragraph), *story* (situation consisting of episode and backgrounds), and *consequences* (final comments and conclusions). These sections of a news story are sequenced in terms of “relevance,” so the general information is contained in the summary, the headline and the lead paragraph. According to van Dijk, this is what the readers can best memorize and recall (Sheyholislami 2001, 4). The basic strategy is top down: realize high level information of each category/topic first, working from left to right; and then express lower level information of each category/topic. However, the general relevance principle is so powerful that it may overrule this strategy. This means that in some cases, semantically minor details are nevertheless expressed in prominent (first, signaled) positions, e.g., in the headline or lead. This significant detail move in news production strategies can be directly influenced by fundamental news values such as negativity, unusualness, unexpectedness, etc. So it is relevant to stress that other factors may influence the realization and expression of underlying topics and news schema categories (van Dijk 1988b, 65).

Therefore, throughout the news report, and at all levels, we may study this special dimension of relevance structuring. At the same time, an analysis of produced relevance distribution in news report also enables us to study the cognitive, social and ideological production conditions of such reports, as well as their processing, and hence their memorization and uses by readers (van Dijk 1988a, 16).

### **3.4 News Discourse Style**

Another important feature of news reports is style. Style of news reports, like any style, is controlled by its communicative context. Readers as communicative partners are present only indirectly and implicitly in news discourse. They are not even addressed, as may be the case in written manuals or textbooks: There is no “you” in the news, except in quotations or sometimes in feature articles or editorials. Hence, stylistically, we may expect distance towards the usually implicit reader (van Dijk 1988a, 74).

News is not only written but also public discourse. Contrary to personal letters or special-purpose publications, its readers are large groups, sometimes defined by similar political or ideological allegiance, but usually undifferentiated at a more personal level. This applies to any type of mass-mediated discourse. Socially and cognitively, this means that a considerable amount of generally shared knowledge, beliefs, norms, and values must be presupposed. Without such taken-for-granted information, the news would not be intelligible.

Moreover, news discourse is also impersonal because it is not produced and expressed by a single individual but by institutionalized organizations, whether public or private. This is, not only is a “you” generally absent, but also a really individual “I”. News stories,

then are not stories of personal experiences, and they do not routinely express private beliefs and opinions. According to the prevailing news ideology, they are intended as impersonal statements of facts. The “I” may be present only as impartial observer, as a mediator of the facts. If news stories are signed the names are not intended as the signals of personal expression but as secondary identifications of an institutional voice (van Dijk 1985, 213). Note that the institutional voice of the news-writer is impersonal only according to the everyday routines and their underlying ideologies. That is, impersonality is a normative accomplishment, not a descriptive one. The signals displayed merely suggest impersonality and impartiality. Clearly, underlying beliefs and attitudes are not so easily suppressed, and they may appear indirectly in the text in many ways: selection of topics; elaboration of topics; relevance hierarchies; use of schematic categories; and finally, in style, such as the words chosen to describe the facts.

Next, news style displays the usual features of formal communication styles, which has been partly explained by the impersonal and institutional nature of mass-mediated discourse in news media. This means that everyday colloquialism, spoken language style, and specific lexical registers are inappropriate and admitted only within quotations. Indeed, quotes are a powerful strategy for the journalist to avoid the constraints on impersonality, opinions, points of view and formality (van Dijk 1988b, 76).

As we can see these features signal many dimensions of the news production process, we also find more direct stylistic marks of news production. Deadlines require fast writing and editing; and to avoid too many grammatical errors, stylistic inappropriateness or semantic nonsense, the syntax and lexicalization must be routinized. We may expect fixed patterns of sentences, strategically effective schemata that can be used frequently to describe recurrent properties of news events (van Dijk 1988b, 77).



Finally, there are feedback constraints from assumed readability and intelligibility. Journalists routinely take into account what they assume the average reader will understand, and this assumption influences their style. Yet this feedback is seldom direct. Newsmakers write according to their intuitive beliefs about middle-class readers. Experimental results about readability are usually less heeded than sales figures. Close participants in the domains and communication styles of which they write, their feedback seldom comes from readers, except in the indirect way of economic market factors. Nor is there any feedback from results in the psychology, of text understanding. Rather impressive evidence suggests that journalists tend to be reluctant to accept insights from any scholarly investigation into their art. Editing and correction of style, then, is mostly based on intuitive insights, professional routine, and common sense, which of course is often sufficient for the effective accomplishment of everyday routine tasks (van Dijk 1988b, 77).

### ***3.5 Rhetorical Structures***

Much like style, the rhetoric of discourse has to do with how we say things. But, whereas news style is heavily constrained by various contextual factors deriving from the public, mass-mediated, and formal nature of news, the use of rhetorical structures in the news depends on the goals and intended effects of communication. Stylistic choices indicate the kind of discourse for a particular situation or the presupposed ideological backgrounds. The recourse to rhetoric is not dictated by context in this way. It may be freely engaged in, if only to make the message more effective. Discourses used for esthetic functions may thus organize surface structures in such a way that rhyme, special intonation

and rhythmical structures, alliterations, and other sound patterns result. Yet, what is esthetically functional may also be used for persuasive ends (van Dijk 1988b, 82).

Persuasion has a very specific aim and function for news discourse. Unlike advertising in the press, news does not primarily aim at promoting goods or services coming from a special firm or institution. Of course, economically, news is also a market commodity that must be promoted and sold. Ideologically, news implicitly promotes the dominant beliefs and opinions of elite groups in society. Pragmatically, however, it is not primarily the type of global speech act that pertains to the actions of the speaker (like promises or threats) or to those of the reader (as accusations). Rather, the bulk of our everyday news is an instance of the speech act of assertion. For such speech acts to be appropriate the writer must express propositions that are not yet known to the reader and which the writer wants the reader to know.

The persuasive dimension that sustains such intentions in practice, then, is the formulation of meanings in such a way that they are not merely understood but also accepted as the truth or at least as a possible truth. Rhetorical structures accompanying assertive speech acts like those performed by the news in the press should be able to enhance the beliefs of the readers assigned to the asserted propositions of the text (van Dijk 1988b, 83).

### **3.5.1 Persuasive Content Features**

The content itself needs further organization, in order to be noticed, understood, represented, memorized, and finally believed and integrated. If propositions are to be accepted as true or plausible, there must be special means to enhance their appearance of

truth and plausibility. News discourse has a number of standard strategies to promote the persuasive process for assertions:

A. Emphasize the factual nature of events, e.g., by:

1. Direct descriptions of ongoing events.
2. Using evidence from close eyewitnesses.
3. Using evidence from the other reliable sources (authorities, respectable people, professionals).
4. Signals that indicate precision and exactness such as numbers for persons, time, events, etc.
5. Using direct quotes from sources, especially when opinions are involved.

B. Build a strong relational structure for facts, e.g., by:

1. Mentioning previous events as conditions or causes and describing or predicting next events as possible or real consequences.
2. Inserting facts into well-known situation models that make them relatively familiar even when they are new.
3. Using well-known scripts and concepts that belong to that script.
4. Trying to further organize facts in well-known specific structures, e.g. narratives.

C. Provide information that also has an attitudinal and emotional dimensions:

1. Facts are better represented and memorized if they involve or arouse strong emotions.
2. The truthfulness of events is enhanced when opinions of different backgrounds or ideologies are quoted about such events, but in general those who are

ideologically close will be given primary attention as possible sources of opinions (van Dijk 1988b, 84–85).

## **4 Processing News as Discourse**

News discourse should not only be characterized in terms of its various structures, as has been done in the previous chapters. It must also be considered as part of complex communication processes. This chapter deals with processes of news production and analyzes the respective steps or phases involved in the making of a news text. The analysis is restricted by focusing on an important dimension of production that has been mostly neglected in the study of newsmaking, namely, the cognitive process involved (van Dijk 1988b, 95).

Little needs to be said here about the broader historical, political, macrosociological, and mass communication properties of news discourse because they have received the major focus in most work on news. Rather, it is important to show how such societal macro properties of news have consequences for, express themselves in, or are enacted by the processing and the structures of news reports at the microlevel. According to van Dijk (1988a, 19), “linking news texts with societal macrostructures in general, and with news production institutions such as the mass media in particular, requires a theoretical strategy that proceeds stepwise through different levels. Direct connections between, for example, history or the world economy and stylistic choices in news texts are highly unlikely.”

### ***4.1 News Participants as Social Actors***

The first theoretical assumption in this intricate network focuses on news communication participants (journalists, media users) as social actors and group members

since news production, obviously, involves journalistic activities and interactions, both among other journalists and among many other social members (van Dijk 1988b, 19; 1988a, 96). It is through their actions, sociocultural practices, organization, and shared beliefs or ideologies that we may link the news text to its institutional and societal production or consumption processes, its economic conditions, its historical role, its functions in the reproduction of ideologies and hence in the legitimation of power of the maintenance of (and resistance against) the status quo in the global information and communication order. As van Dijk says, it is irrelevant whether or how the activities of news participants are influenced or even determined by these broadest historical, cultural, or socioeconomic contexts. His assumption is that they do have their position in such networks, but the links may be very indirect, thus allowing for a certain degree of indeterminacy and individual variation.

Although the analysis of the positions and activities of news participants is a way to relate news texts with its numerous contexts, it does not provide the most direct link between texts and their processes of production or use. As an important component of the social dimensions of news participants, we first focus on their cognitive dimension. Without this aspect of news production and usage, we cannot describe or explain the processes of understanding, meaning assignment, information transfer, persuasion, ideological reproduction, or any other aspect that defines symbolic communication through language and discourse. The importance of cognitive processing as a key phase in linking text and context through news participants does not imply that such cognitive processes are only personal or individual. Since this analysis do not deal with with journalists or media users as unique individuals but as social actors and group members, our cognitive approach focuses on social cognition (van Dijk 1988b, 19).

## ***4.2 Social Cognition and News Processing***

The basis of a cognitive analysis of news discourse processing consists of the interplay between representations and operations in memory. The operations have a strategic nature (van Dijk and Kintsch 1983). They analyze various types of incoming information and handle internal representations in a tentative but effective way. Strategies allow parallel processing, that is, analysis of partial and incomplete information from various sources and the same time. Therefore, the central interpretation processes that define discourse comprehension make flexible use of textual surface structures (i.e., syntactic, lexical), contextual information from ongoing interaction, properties of the social situation, and various types of knowledge representations in memory. These processes work both bottom up and top down; that is, they use concrete (local) information to build larger, more abstract or higher level structures, and conversely, use such higher level structures to derive expectations about which concrete information is most likely to come (van Dijk 1988b, 19).

The input and output of these strategic operations are various types of representations. Van Dijk says that knowledge in memory may be represented in the form of scripts. Such scripts may be thought of as abstract, schematic, hierarchically organized sets of propositions, of which the final nodes are empty, so that they can be applied to different situations by filling in such terminal nodes with specific information. Besides scripts of episodes, we also have frame representations of known objects or persons in semantic memory, as well as knowledge of units, categories or rules of language, discourse, and communication. Finally, people have schematic representations of general-opinions, that is, evaluative beliefs about social events, structures, or issues (such public health care,

abortion or immigration). For such abstract opinion schemata; which are also socially acquired, shared, and used by social groups and their members, we simply use the classical terms of attitudes (1988b, 20).

### **4.3 Models**

These various types of social knowledge and beliefs including language codes, frames, scripts, and attitudes form the general representations used to interpret concrete incoming information such as situations, events, actions and discourse. These strategic processes of analysis and interpretation take place in working or short-term memory. The results of these operations are then stored in episodic memory, which like semantic (social) memory is part of long-term memory. This episodic memory functions as a storage facility for all our incoming and interpreted interpretation and embodies all our personal experiences, both of events and of discourses, which we have observed (read) or participated in. In this way, each event or situation is represented in terms of a subjective model.

This situation model is also organized schematically and features fixed categories such as Setting (Time, Location), Circumstance, Participants, Event/Action, and their respective properties, including evaluative ones. To understand a text, language users not only build an episodic representation of it but also of the event or situation such a text is about, that is, a model. Thus, models also function as the referential basis of cognitive interpretation and are essential to account for the conditions of discourse coherence (van Dijk 1988b, 22).

In accordance with sociological theory, it is not so much the real world that people act upon or speak about but rather their intersubjective models of interpreted events and

situations of the world. Models, therefore, also explain personal and group differences in social information processing.

To illustrate, if we process media reports about the UN council's attack on Libya in March 2011, we build a mental model of that event with the help of the information from these reports. Later texts about this event may be used to update the model with new details, and this is precisely one of the central cognitive functions of news discourse.

We use sets of such models to make generalizations and abstractions and eventually may rebuild the kind of frames, scripts, or attitudes that form our general social knowledge and beliefs. This means that between unique models on one side and abstract scripts on the other, we also must have generalized (but still personal) models of our routine experiences with recurrent events or situations—for instance of going to work, of daily dinner, or of shopping each Saturday morning. Models are the core representations of all our understanding processes. The same applies to text production, understanding, and communication: The first goal of these processes is to produce understanding, that is, to build or update a model or to convey a model to the recipient. In other words we have understood a text only if we have understood what situation it is about, that is, if we have a model of (or for) the text. This is also true for news reports (van Dijk 1988b, 23).

### **4.3.1 Models in Context**

In order to participate in a communicative event, we build a model of the context, featuring a communicative setting, location, circumstances, speech participants, and the kind of speech acts or other communicative acts involved. The representation of the text or dialogue itself may be thought of as the core of the model of that communicative event: During or shortly after the communicative event, this textual representation allows us to



recall and reproduce more or less exactly what was said and how. On the basis of all those texts, we try to imagine what happened by building a model of the situation; it is this model, and especially its higher level macrostructures, that are later used for reproduction, in our case in conversations about news events.

This reproduction of news stories, therefore, is not necessarily correct. Since personal beliefs, opinions, and experiences are part of situation models of texts, our reproduction of such texts will also feature false recalls, that is, information we think we have actually read, but which is inferred from our personal model information retrieved or generated during reading. Script or attitude-based information that has become part of such models is often reproduced in such forms of biased recall. A well-known example is the recall by readers of crime stories involving black youths. This biased recall is based on ethnic opinions derived from ethnic prejudice schemata in social memory. Generally, people tend to recall best the information that supports their knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes, as well as specific deviations from such information (van Dijk 1988b, 23).

## 5 Analysis

Against the background of the issues and the theoretical framework outlined in the previous section, the next sections report the results of the analysis of the American and Islamic news stories about the American president Barack Obama in the context of the death of Osama bin Laden. This event was the main topic in the majority of the world's newspapers and their online editions on May 2 and 3, 2011. Osama bin Laden, the founder and leader of the al-Qaeda terror organization responsible for the September 11 attacks on the United States and numerous other mass-casualty attacks against civilian and military targets, was killed by the team of U.S. operatives on Sunday, May 1, 2011 in Abbottabad, Pakistan. Late Sunday night President Obama made the official announcement that Osama bin Laden is dead. The various agencies began to distribute this news and most of the morning papers in America of May 2 carried it on their front pages if the dispatches were on time for the night deadline. The morning newspapers in the Middle East did not yet have the news about bin Laden's death because of the time difference.

One of the aims of the case study was to collect online news stories about this event coming from the Islamic and American news servers. The news stories were collected from four different news servers, two of them were Islamic and the other two American. As for the language of the Islamic servers, both of them were in English.

The following American news servers were analyzed:

- ap.org (The Associated Press)
- suntimes.com (The Chicago Sun-Times)

The following Islamic servers were analyzed:

- muslimmedianetwork.com (The Muslim Observer)

- [islamicnews.org.sa](http://islamicnews.org.sa) (International Islamic News Agency)

The theoretical issues, which are going to be applied in my analysis have been stated, so I can now proceed to a qualitative analysis of the news data. I start with a description of the thematic structures (macrostructures) of the news articles representing the president Barack Obama in regard of the killing of Osama bin Laden.

### ***5.1 Thematic Structures***

By thematic structures we understand the hierarchical organization of themes or topics of a text defining what is the most important information of a text (van Dijk 1988b, 72). Topics are a property of the meaning or content of a text and, therefore, require theoretical analysis in term of a semantic theory. Topics, however, are not defined as the meaning of individual words or sentences. We only speak about the summary, gist or most important information of an utterance when we are dealing with larger stretches of talk or text. Hence, topics belong to the global, macrolevel of discourse description (van Dijk 1988a, 31).

My topical analysis, which is applied only to a limited number of news reports from American and Islamic news servers, shows how the themes and topics are organized in the news.

### **5.1.1 Topics in the Thematic Structure of News Reports**

#### **The Associated Press (May 6, 2011)**

The Headline: OBAMA IN NY: WE NEVER FORGET, WE MEAN WHAT WE SAY

1. The president Barack Obama honored victims of the September 11 terror attacks after the killing of Osama bin Laden.
2. Obama said the killing of Osama proves America will never forget the 11/9 attacks
3. Enthusiastic and happy New Yorkers came to greet Obama.
4. Obama declared that justice was done.
5. Bin Laden was shot dead but none of the U. S. commandos was killed.
6. Obama called for a new spirit of national unity.
7. The results of the raid on bin Laden showed the U.S. did what they promised.
8. The U.S. took more care of bin Laden's burial than he took when killing 3,000 people.
9. New Yorkers were gratified to see bin Laden's demise.

#### **The Chicago Sun-Times server (May 3, 2011)**

The Headline: BIN LADEN NEWS GIVES BOOST TO OBAMA 2012

1. The death of Osama bin Laden will help Obama's 2012 re-election bid.
2. Obama's order to invade bin Laden's compound was a courageous decision.
3. (a) Due to the killing of bin Laden, Obama will be kept in people's mind.  
(b) There will be no need for any mass Obama 2012 campaign.
4. Obama's popularity decreased owing to the economical and political issues of the U.S.

5. (a) The taking out of bin Laden lifted the national mood.  
(b) Obama doubters might keep or renew their “relationship” with Obama.
6. Obama said justice was done and the world is better place without Osama.

To begin the analysis of the thematic structures of The Associated Press story, we can notice that the headline actually summarizes the topics of the text. That is, it focuses mainly on the reactions of Barack Obama and American citizens about the killing of Osama bin Laden. The whole story is significantly pro-Obama, we can actually recognize this from the topics praising both the U. S. forces and Obama. What is presented in the lead paragraph is the context of the 9/11 terror attacks that emphasizes how important bin Laden's demise is for the families of the victims and for the U.S. itself. There are several themes throughout the story referring to Obama's comment that justice was done. This indicates that the correspondent fully approves of the political values of Obama. The description of the main event that is the killing bin Laden itself is mentioned here very briefly as it is not deemed a marginal topic of the story.

Although the Chicago Sun-Times news coverage is shorter, it has a similar tone. However, it focuses even more on the news actor, Barack Obama and his possible popularity increase due to the death of Osama bin Laden. Obama is expected to gain new supporters and voters that might ensure his re-election in 2012. A positive comments about Obama's order to invade Osama's compound are stated both in the top and bottom of the story, which again shows the ideological and political agreement. Despite the correspondent's positive approach, Obama's popularity struggling before bin Laden was killed is also mentioned. This topic gives us more objective picture of the story comparing it to the AP coverage that is rather biased and portrays Obama as the national hero.

**The International Islamic News Agency server (May 2, 2011)**

The Headline: USA/ AL-QAIDA: PRESIDENT **OBAMA**: U.S. KILLS OSAMA BIN LADEN IN PAKISTAN

1. President Obama announced the leader of al-Qaida was killed.
2. Obama said that justice was done.
3. (a) The U. S. forces killed bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan.  
(b) The body was buried at sea.
4. Both U.S. political parties were proud of Obama and U. S. intelligence.
5. (a) Obama declared the U. S. is not at war with Islam.  
(b) Osama bin Laden was not a Muslim leader .
6. Obama's decision to launch raid was not shared with any other country.
7. The U. S. is aware of a possible retaliation.
8. Bin Laden's death will help Obama's reputation.
9. The U. S. will remain at war in Afghanistan.
10. The U. S. will take revenge on everybody who does harm to the American people.

**The Muslim Observer server (May 12, 2011)**

The Headline: BIN LADEN: OBAMA SNATCHES DEFEAT FROM JAWS OF VICTORY

1. American people celebrate the death of Osama bin Laden.
2. Obama called for national unity.
3. The fact that Osama was unarmed was kept back by the U.S.
4. Obama declared that justice was done.

5. A 9/11 survivor said he cannot be glad that Osama is dead.
6. Ten times more people that died on 9/11 die every year in gun-related crime in America.
7. The killing of bin Laden was not real justice.
  - (b) Osama was not arrested and tried.
  - (c) Osama was unarmed.
  - (d) The U. S. forces entered Pakistan unannounced.
8. An international human rights lawyer does not approve of Obama's interpretation of justice.
9. Israel got inspired by the U.S. to assassinate Palestinian leaders.

The International Islamic News Agency (IINA), which is a Saudi Arabian news agency, covers the death of Osama bin Laden in a very original way and also the range of topics in the story is very broad. The lead mentions Obama's famous statement that justice was done and how important the death of Osama is for the U.S. The lead is followed by the circumstances of the killing of Osama that are more detailed than in the American journals. Another topic pinpoints the U.S. relationship with the Muslim world. Obama's comment that "the U. S. is not and never will be at war with Islam" shows a friendly American face towards Islam, however, one would expect more anti-American attitude in this news story due to the Islamic background of the agency. Nevertheless, the fact that the U.S. has concerns about possible retaliation from Islamic world that might take revenge upon the U.S. is stated as another topic.

The bottom of the text tells about Obama's popularity boost as a result of bin Laden's death and about the message of the event (bin Laden's death). Personally, I do not consider

this coverage to be somehow biased. It does not present topics that would be straightforwardly either anti-U.S or pro-Islamic. This might be because of the fact that the IINA is the source of news for media and Islamic organizations all over the world, including USA, South Africa, India and etc., and needs to maintain its unbiased viewpoint of the Muslim world (IINA 2011).

Another analyzed Islamic newspaper is the Muslim Observer. The Muslim Observer coverage presents topics that are quite similar to the ones already mentioned but also topics which we would not find in the rest of reports. These topics contain of personal comments and opinions that give a radically anti-U.S. tone to the story. In addition, Obama is pictured here as “a smug-looking president lecturing the world about justice being done”, we would hardly find this comment in a mainstream news media. The negative picture of the U.S. is also emphasized by stating the reaction of an international human rights lawyer who claims the U.S. raid on Osama was not in the accordance with law. Moreover, another ideologically-based topic tells about the admiration and praise of Israel that the U.S. earned for the killing of bin Laden.

As we can read on the web page of the Muslim Observer, the journal's goal is to present news in a positive way highlighting the perspective of Muslims in a manner completely free of the anti-Muslim bias (Muslim Observer 2011). There is no doubt that this news story is an example of it, however, the anti-American mood far outweighs its pro-Muslim values.

From the analysis of the thematic analysis of four online news stories about the killing of Osama bin Laden the following findings may be provisionally drawn:

1. Each headline of the four news stories mentions Obama, which makes him the most important actor of the event.



2. If the story comes from the Islamic or American source, it always features the so-called kernel topics that represent the main event, that is the U.S. operation against bin Laden.
3. Topical differences appear especially in the order of context and consequences. While the stories from the American sources tend to talk first about the consequences, the Islamic news reports favor to state the political context of the event.
4. All news stories provide enough political evaluation of the possible consequences focusing especially on the U.S.
5. There seem to be few regional, cultural and ideological constraint on topical organization. The presence, emphasis, absence or downgrading of information about Barack Obama and Osama bin Laden, however, may lead to a slightly more negative, neutral or positive portrayal of both, depending on a pro-U.S. or pro-Islamic perspective.
6. The canonical ordering of topics roughly follows the main event, context, backgrounds schema of presentation. The first three news stories (AP, Chicago Sun-Times, IINA) emphasize consequences and both Obama's and international reactions whereas the last one emphasizes the political evaluation and comments by mentioning such topics early in the story, for instance, directly after the lead.
7. In general, the overall macroproposition "The death of Osama bin Laden" dominates in the thematic structure of the items analyzed. However, the headlines and leads appear to put more emphasis on the president Barack Obama. The two other major topics deal with the political context and consequences of the event.

Details about the precise circumstances of the U.S. operation and verbal reactions seem to vary across the news stories.

## **5.2 Style and Rhetoric**

### **Lexical style of the News**

The choice of words, even more than syntactic patterns, is usually associated with the style of discourse. The choice of specific words may signal the degree of formality, the relationship between the speech partners, the group-based or institutional embedding of discourse, and especially the attitudes and hence ideologies of speaker. Whether the newspaper selects *terrorist* or *freedom fighter* to denote the same person is not so much a question of semantics as an indirect expression of implied but associated values incorporated in shared-word meanings. Besides this standard example of ideologically-based lexical variation in the news media, such opinion-controlled lexical choices abound, although many are more subtle (van Dijk 1988a, 81).

Other lexical choices do not originate in sociopolitical ideology but are part of professional registers used to denote specific event characteristics. Finally, lexical style may be controlled by rhetorical strategies, e.g., those of understatement. Mitigation, especially used when describing negative acts of important news actors, are a routine procedure, used also to avoid charges of libel. The stereotypical term “controversial,” for instance, is used routinely to denote characteristics of a person that are considered negative by the journalist or other important reference groups. Point of view is crucial in this case. What for one journalist is “tough” or “strong” action or policy may be “aggressive” or “offensive” for others (van Dijk 1988a, 82).

## 5.2.1 Stylistic Descriptions of Barack Obama

The Associated Press (May, 5, 2011)

*Solemnly honoring* victims of the Sept. 11 terror attacks, *President Barack Obama hugged* survivors *thanked* the heroes of one of the nation's darkest days and declared Thursday that the killing of Osama bin Laden after all these years was an American message to the world: “When we say we will never forget, we mean what we say.”

Referring to the daring U.S. raid to take down bin Laden in Pakistan, Obama said of all those who died on Sept. 11: “It says we keep them in our hearts. We haven't forgotten.”

Obama met with firefighters then police, before having *a solemn moment* at ground zero and meeting *privately* with families of those who died.

The president *closed his eyes* and *clasped his hands* at the outdoor memorial where the twin towers of the World Trade Center once dominated the Manhattan skyline.

Obama intended to *privately thank* participants in the raid.

The president also peppered his brief comments with reminders of the challenges ahead, and his call for a new spirit of national unity.

**The Chicago Sun-Times (May 3, 2011)**

Does the death of the terrorist help *Barack Obama's* 2012 re-election bid?

Obama's order for U.S. Special forces to invade bin Laden's Pakistan compound was a “*courageous decision*” and “*one of the finest operations you could ever expect*”

Obama *had faced a grinding mood of defeatism* in some quarters, with the *slow recovery of the economy*, troops still in Afghanistan, Iraq and more recently above Libya, tornadoes hitting the South and gas prices soaring.

*That well serves Obama*, as his campaign team in Chicago is studying how to get people on the fence about Obama back in fold.

Those who have doubts about Obama's performance on an issue – say, the economy – now can, because of the success of the raid, justify keeping or renewing their “relationship” with Obama. At least for now.

“The world is safer; it is a better place because of the death of Osama bin Laden,” Obama said in the White House.

#### **The International Islamic News Agency (May 2, 2011)**

*President Barack Obama made the dramatic late-night announcement*, ending the *long, elusive* international manhunt for the leader of the al Qaida terror organization responsible for the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

“Justice was done, *said Obama.*”

Lawmakers from both political parties *praised* U.S. intelligence, armed forces and *Obama*, even as they said it didn't end the threat from al Qaida and Islamic terrorism.

“The United States is not and never will be at war with Islam,” Obama said

*Obama's decision to launch the raid* wasn't shared with any other country.

“Bin Laden's death also represents *a major boost* for Obama coming as he *struggles with an uncertain economic recovery* and mixed public sentiment about the U.S. approach to civilian uprising in Libya through the Middle East

and North Africa. Even as Obama *jabbed* Donald Trump in a domestic politics monologue at Saturday night's celebrity studded White House Correspondents' Association dinner, he knew the mission to take bin Laden was under way."

### **The Muslim Observer (May 12, 2011)**

"And just like George W. Bush did on that horrific day way back in 2001, *US President Barack Obama unashamedly wallowed in a flag-waving, nationalistic wave of emotion*, crowing about national unity and everyone pulling together as he revealed the manhunt for the world's most wanted man had finally been concluded."

"The naked display of *uncontrollable gung-ho emotion* was bad enough but then *a smug-looking Obama* began sounding like Glenn Ford in a scene from High Noon as he *lectured* the world about justice being done."

That *the most powerful man in the world can stare* straight into the cameras and say: "Justice was done" over Bin Laden's murder *borders on absurdity; it's almost Pythonesque*.

Shaul Mofaz of the right wing Kadima is now urging the Zionist Government to assassinate Palestinian leaders like the "US did with Osama bin Laden". He seems to have overlooked the fact that Israel has been "doing an Obama" for years as the leadership of Hamas can testify.

After bringing an end to the biggest manhunt in US history, *the US President has managed to snatch a defeat from the jaws of victory*.

The stylistic description of Barack Obama is of primary importance because it may show some of the implicit evaluations of Obama as a person or as a politician. The designations by four online news journals for president Barack Obama are listed above. The analysis reveals the familiar devices of journalistic distance, such as quotes, and the use of indirect discourse and declarative sentences. In general, role descriptors such as “Obama”, “president Barack Obama”, “U.S president Barack Obama” and “the most powerful man in the world” are used. However, the other designations are more evaluative. The general evaluation in the first three news stories (AP, Chicago Sun-Times, IINA) are rather positive, however, the last one (Muslim Observer) portrays Barack Obama in a very harsh and unflattering way. To illustrate, he is described here as “a smug-looking president who unashamedly wallowed in a flag-waving, nationalistic wave of emotion” and as somebody who has managed to “snatch defeat from the jaws of victory”. The AP says that “the president also peppered his brief comment with reminders of the challenges ahead, and his call for a new spirit of national unity” while the Muslim Observer covers Obama to be “crowing about national unity”. In comparison to the lexical style of the other news coverages, the MO news story also includes an idiomatic expression, less formal words and colloquialisms without the use of quotes.

There is no doubt that the choice of words used in all news coverages are ideologically-based, however, it is most easily recognizable in the Muslim Observer. It is apparent from the lexical choice of the MO news story that it not only strongly denounces Obama for the killing of Osama bin Laden but also criticizes the U.S. politics of fear and the ideological manipulation with its own people. Furthermore, the lexical style of the MO story seems to mirror the cultural and political misunderstanding of the U.S., it is also clear

that the killing of bin Laden and the U.S. reactions on this event are described in terms of ideological disapproval.

If we analyze the lexical style of the other news stories, we can see that the chosen words describing Obama and the U.S. politics tend to become standardized and ideologically approving of the U.S. The news stories of the American online journals portray Obama as a respected president who managed to reach justice by killing Osama.

To avoid constraints of impersonality, quotations are mostly used when expressing Obama's attitude to the event. The news stories are in accordance with the formal style and political jargon borrowed from diplomats and politicians. The coverage by the IINA is also stylistically formal with the frequent use of quotations. Although the IINA's background is Islamic, the image of Obama concerning the death of Osama bin Laden is not somehow negative or unflattering. More to the contrary, it is standardized with the indications of the American political consensus evaluation of Barack Obama. However, instead of taking this image of Obama for granted, a possibility that this positive portrait of Obama is the strategy of the IINA should be also taken into account.

### **5.2.2 Rhetoric and the Effectiveness of News**

The persuasive nature of news is not primarily geared towards the change of opinions and attitudes, even when these may eventually change on the basis of information given or suggested by news discourse. Rather, news has an assertion-type speech act function, and its major aim is to achieve credibility with the reader. Hence, rhetorical strategies are used to stress the preciseness and the truthfulness of the text. Rhetorical devices that may be used include direct observations, interviews with eyewitnesses, quotations from

participants, scene descriptions, and especially numbers (van Dijk 1988a, 114). I will briefly illustrate these points by analyzing the news stories that we have been already familiar with. Such concrete case studies can better compare news items about the same event (the death of Osama bin Laden), so that variations in description and formulation become evident.

### **Obama in NY: We never forget, we mean what we say (The Associated Press)**

As the headline suggests, the AP news story focuses more on the actor Barack Obama since Osama bin Laden is not even mentioned. In addition, the prominence of Barack Obama is enhanced by the quotation, which adds the dramatic dimension to the story. The quotation: “When we say we will never forget, we mean what we say” is Obama's reaction on the fact that Osama bin Laden was killed by the U.S. forces. The message is clear, America kept its promise and got the most wanted terrorist in the history of the United States. It is in accordance with the American interests and so is the rest of the news story. If we analyze the rhetoric use of numbers, we can notice that the September 11 is mentioned at the very beginning. This date is there in order to remind the reader of the terror attacks on the World Trade Center organized by al-Qaeda and it also builds a strong relational structure for the facts. The mention of 3,000 victims of the Sept. 11 also emphasizes the tragedy and arouses strong emotions in readers. What also makes the story rhetorically effective is the use of an eyewitness report: Deanne McDonald stood at the northeast corner of the WTC site waving an American flag in each hand and shouting “Obama got Osama! Obama got Osama!” “God bless the Navy Seals”, said McDonald, 38, from Brooklyn. She took work off on Thursday to wait for the president, saying she was



prouder than ever to be an American. Since the reported participant is an American woman, it is as if an ordinary American reader himself or herself had seen the event.

Only the authorities and sources that declare happiness about the U.S. operation are quoted. Methodologically, devices that enhance truthfulness, plausibility, credibility and emotional dimension are used. These devices include a selective use of reliable, official and especially credible persons and institutions; the quotation of eyewitnesses or direct participants; concrete details; ideologically coherent perspectives in the description of events; the uses of specific scripts or attitude schemata; and the reference or appeal to emotions.

### **Bin Laden news gives boost to Obama 2012 (The Chicago Sun-Times)**

This news item deals with bin Laden and possible consequences of his death for Obama. Let me first examine the use of numbers in this news story. As we can see, the first number is stated in the headline, which indicates the number's prominence in the news story. The year of next Obama's presidential campaign signals precision and credibility of the event. Other number is found in the quotation of Oliver North, a retired U.S. Marine Corps official and political commentator: "Obama's order for U.S. special forces to invade bin Laden's Pakistan compound was one of the finest operations you could ever expect". The death of bin Laden is so far the most successful achievement of Obama's administration and this is what the American press wants to enhance in news stories. Hence, here it is done by a figure (one of the finest operations) that is included in a quotation of a respectable person and former professional U.S. official. However, the quotation of Barack Obama at the bottom of the news story emphasizes even more the factual nature of the event since elite sources are not only considered more newsworthy (as news actors) but also as more reliable as observers and opinion formulators (van Dijk 1988b, 87). What also makes this news story rhetorically effective is mentioning that the killing of bin Laden will be appreciated and kept in mind of Americans, which can bring Obama success in the presidential campaign in 2012. Readers might be already familiar with this possible consequence so it boosts the persuasive process of the news story. Generally, the text, by its rhetoric, highly supports the scripts and attitudes that American people already share about the event so it is easy for them to accept the proportions.

**USA/Al Qaida: President Obama: U.S. Kills Osama bin Laden in Pakistan**  
**(IINA)**

The news item by the International Islamic News Agency primarily deals with the death of Osama bin Laden itself. The message the headline carries tells that the long manhunt for the leader of Al-Qaeda was finished. To enhance the weight of the news, Obama is quoted: "Justice has been done". The story is also exaggerated by mentioning the Sept. 11 attacks as it was the main reason why the U.S. wanted to get Osama dead or alive. Other applied devices of rhetoric in this news story are reports from pro-American sources, such as president Obama and the U.S. officials. They described the process of the U.S. operation against bin Laden and declared that his demise should be welcomed by all who believe in peace and human dignity. Although this news story comes from the Muslim background, the facts are presented by quoting reliable American sources that strongly enhance the credibility of the news. In addition, these American sources not only express the happiness about the death of Osama but also a real concern for the safety of the U.S. since a revenge is expected from Islamic world. Yet, it is essential to mention that the reliable American sources quoted in the story do not necessarily need to be reliable for the IINA even though it is not explicitly expressed in the text. An Arabic source is also mentioned, albeit it does not express any positive or negative opinion about the U.S. operation. Indeed, there is no clear-cut indication that the journal would try to play down any fact of the event or favor American or Islamic ideological interests, nevertheless, behind the mask of neutrality might be hidden a possible ideological disapproval.

We may conclude that the devices enhancing the truthfulness are used, such as numbers signaling precision; evidence from authorities of different ideological

background; quotes involving opinions; and facts that support well-known situation models.

**Bin Laden: Obama Snatches Defeat from Jaws of Victory (The Muslim Observer)**

Let me first analyze the headline consisting of an idiom. To snatch defeat from jaws of victory actually means to win at the last moment, so Obama is considered here to win a surprising victory at the last moment and of course the victory represents the death of bin Laden. What the headline tends to claim is that Obama's political career would be at risk whether bin Laden was not killed. This script has negative connotation towards Barack Obama. The persuasive process is also promoted by a range of quotations and opinions of reliable sources, however, they all express negative and mixed feelings about the U.S. raid upon Osama bin Laden. The general belief that Osama bin Laden was a most wanted terrorist who had killed a lot of innocent people is played down and embedded in opinions claiming no justice was done by executing bin Laden without arresting him and putting him on trial. Simply, the scripts that talk against Obama, the U.S. politics, American people abound. The rhetorical effectiveness is also supported by the use of numbers. Most important, 30,000 innocents are said to be killed every year in gun-related crime in the U.S. – that is a 9/11 multiplied by ten. This number is most significant for the Islamic journal in this news story as it tends to downplay the number of victims from the 9/11 and justify the terrorist attack itself. The extensive attention is paid to criticism of the U.S., hence this news story should not be read primarily with a dominant bin Laden script but with an anti-American attitude schema.

### **5.3 Photographs**

Having studied both the microstructural and macrostructural properties of news discourse, we turn now to the photographs that accompany the news about the killing of Osama bin Laden by the U.S. Even though photographs are the most important visual dimension of the news (van Dijk 1988, 115), only two out of the four analyzed news stories were accompanied by pictures. The first picture comes from the Chicago Sun-Times server. It shows a man dressed in a military uniform holding up a scoreboard that displays Obama – one, Osama – nil, as thousands of people around him celebrate. The photograph was taken right after president Barack Obama announced the death of Osama bin Laden during an address to the nation from the White House in Washington.

If we look at the picture more closely, it is clear that the scoreboard is a symbol of the fight between al-Qaeda (Osama bin Laden) and the United States (Barack Obama), and according to the score, the winner is the U.S., more concretely president Barack Obama. What is also worth noticing is that the man holding the scoreboard is wearing a military uniform. The uniform accompanied by the score might be the symbol of dominance of the U.S. army and its proud victory over the al-Qaeda leader, Osama bin Laden. The cheering crowd shows how proud and happy American people are due to the fact that one of the most important missions of the U.S., the mission to fight for justice, was successfully completed. The picture itself can actually influence a reader much more effectively even before he starts reading the news story itself.

The second photograph that is analyzed comes from the Muslim Observer. While the Chicago Sun-Times picture represents the atmosphere among people in America, in the picture of the MO portrays a woman wearing a hijab, the head covering traditionally worn

by Muslim women. The woman is probably Yvonne Ridley, British journalist and the author of the news story. Because her head is covered by a scarf, it is highly possible she is a Muslim herself. If I interpret her facial expression, she looks as a confident and level-headed lady who is certain of her faith and views. Of course, without reading the news story itself we cannot understand what her views on the killing of Osama bin Laden are, however, the scarf indicates she might have ideologically more pro-Islamic attitude.

## 6 News Production

News production and comprehension crucially involve social representations. Journalists and readers in one society, class, or culture share part of these representations, which are, therefore, usually presupposed in news stories. Major social institutions, their properties and major social groups or classes are assumed to be known to the readers or viewers. Journalists as a group also belong to a professional middle class and according to our major assumption of sociocognitive representation, such group positions are also reflected in their cognitive representations. Not only general norms, goals, and values but also the interests shared by such groups are embodied in what journalists know and think about other social groups and structures (van Dijk 1988a, 28).

It follows that the social schemata of journalists are strategically applied in their construction of models of news events. Together, these models and schemata determine how journalists interpret new social events, represent them in (new) models, and update old models. It means the representation and reproduction of news events by journalists is not a direct or passive operation but rather a socially and ideologically controlled set of constructive strategies. Whether in direct observation of potential news events or in the much more frequent processing of source texts about such news events, the production processes of journalists are inherently monitored by the models journalists have about such news event. And these models are inherently biased by their underlying social representations; for journalists of the dominant press, these are essentially dominant representations. This does not exclude personal variation, deviation, resistance, and hence change.

Social representations as well as institutional constraints, which are also cognitively stored because they must be known in order to act within them, are, however, very powerful, so that personal decisions and actions of journalists are usually limited to less consequential details of new production (van Dijk 1988a, 29). Due to the fact that the background of newsmakers (news agencies) significantly influences the representation of news events and the news production itself (van Dijk 1988a, 29), the institutional background of the news agencies is unveiled.

## ***6.1 The Institutional Background of the News Agencies***

### **The Associated Press**

One of the analyzed news stories was produced by the Associated Press (AP). The AP, located in the city of New York, is a global news network which serves thousands of daily newspapers, radio, television and online customers with coverage in text, photos, graphics, audio and video.

The AP supplies a steady stream of news around the clock to its domestic members, international subscribers and commercial customers. It has a 24-hour continuously updated online news service, a state-of-the-art television news service and one of the largest radio networks in the United States (AP 2011).

The AP is neither privately owned nor government-funded company, but it is a not-for-profit news cooperative owned by its American newspaper and broadcast members. The members, such as the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the USA Today, the Washington Post or ABC News, both contribute stories to the AP and use material written by its staff journalists. Many newspapers and broadcasters outside the United States are AP



subscribers that pay a fee to use the AP material without being contributing members of the cooperative (AP 2011).

Since the AP is one of the main “distributors” of news not only in the United States but also in the world, it is expected that the social representation of news events be in accordance with the interests of the prevailing political and economical power centers, dominant goals and values of major social classes in the U.S. Therefore, by using and spreading the AP material, American and foreign newspapers and broadcasters create an ideologically strong network and put the AP into a position of an ideologically dominant news agency in the world.

To unveil how these institutional features are used in a text, the AP news story about the killing of Osama bin Laden has been analyzed. The American values are featured in this news story mainly in the quotations of president Barack Obama who himself is expected to be the institutional embodiment of the U.S. ideology and part of its political power. Obama declares that the death of Osama bin Laden is the victory of the U.S. over its infamous enemy and that this event proved the commitment of the U.S. is to make sure that justice is done. His words strongly support the national unity (ideological unity) of the United States and mirror the general attitude of the U.S. nation towards this issue.

### **The Chicago Sun-Times**

The Chicago Sun-Times is an American daily newspaper published in Chicago and it is the flagship paper of the Sun-Times Media Group. Privately owned, the Sun-Times Media Group (formerly Hollinger International) is a publisher of English-language newspapers operating primarily in the US. It is engaged in the publishing, printing and distribution of newspapers. The company's properties consist of more than 100 newspapers

and associated websites and news products. The Sun-Times Media is dedicated to being the premier source of local news and information for the greater Chicago area. Its media properties server more than 300 communities across the region. It owns eight daily newspapers, including its flagship, The Chicago Sun-Times and [suntimes.com](http://suntimes.com) and seven suburban daily newspapers: The Beacon-News (Aurora), The Courier-News (Elgin, The Herald-News (Joliet), Lake County News-Sun, Naperville Sun, Post-Tribune (Merrillville, Ind.) and the SouthtownStar. Sun-Times Media owns 39 weekly newspapers published by the Pioneer Press and 11 weekly Sun newspapers, as well as Web sites for those newspapers, [centerstagechicago.com](http://centerstagechicago.com), [RogerEbert.com](http://RogerEbert.com), [SearchChicago.com](http://SearchChicago.com) and [YourSeason.com](http://YourSeason.com) (Sun-Times Media 2011).

Unlike the AP, the Chicago Sun-Times is a newspaper that is privately funded, which means that its existence is dependent on the readership and circulation. It indicates that it can survive only when it serves its clients (readers) with the products (news stories) that are expected from it. Therefore, the social representation of events should be in compliance with the Chicago readers' attitude. In addition, as one of the main journals in the area of Chicago, it might mirror the prevailing political and economical interests of an elite group in the area of this city.

To discover whose these political and economical interests might be, we will look more closely at the Chicago Sun-Times news story. This news story praises the successful U.S. operation against Osama bin Laden, deals with president Barack Obama and his presidential campaign of 2012. What the news claims is that the U.S. raid will boost Obama's popularity, which might result in his re-election. It is important to mention that Obama is a former Chicago community organizer and senator of Illinois. Moreover, his campaign team operates in Chicago as well. It indicates that Obama might still have strong

political connections and voters' support in this city. Therefore, it is understandable that the Chicago Sun-Times inclines towards portraying Obama in a favorable way. The news story also reminds Chicago readers, Obama's possible voters, of the success of the raid, which can make readers keep or renew their “relationship” with Obama and so increase the possibility of Obama's re-election.

### **The International Islamic News Agency**

The International Islamic News Agency (IINA) based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, is a specialized organ of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). IINA was established in 1972 according to a resolution by the Third Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM). It is financed by OIC member states, especially by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Pakistan, Kuwait, Indonesia, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia. The OIC is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations, which has membership of 57 states spread over four continents. The organization attempts to be the collective voice of the Muslim world and ensuring to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world (OIC 2011).

Recently, the Board of Administration initiated a restructuring project of IINA and the major objectives for this restructuring are to bring IINA to a position where it can achieve its mission of serving as a center for exchange of expertise among member states, issuing feature services on social, economic and cultural activities in member states, issuing annual publications on important events in the Muslim world and its personalities, being an effective tool in the area of information exchange among the OIC member states,

serving as an effective media arm and support the new mission and vision of the OIC and its organs and effectively projecting the viewpoints of the Muslim world (IINA 2011).

The IINA has correspondents in various countries and works to increase their number. The agency sends its journalists to visit several countries to collect reports and news and to discuss and develop cooperation with media in those countries. IINA distributes daily news and reports in Arabic, English and French and prepares in-depth audio-video news files about topics that are of common interest of member countries. IINA disseminates its news daily via Qatar News Agency (QNA) which disseminates the news to 700 points in the Arab World, Europe and America in Arabic, English and Portuguese to cover Asia. IINA also sends daily bulletins via the Pan-African News Agency (PANA). It also sends news bulletins to many media (including radios and newspapers) and to Islamic organizations all over the world, including the USA, South Africa, India etc. (IINA 2011).

Since the International Islamic News Agency is the organ of the OIC, we can expect that it primarily serves the political and social interests of the member states of this Islamic organization. With regard to the foreign relations of the OIC, the main OIC members are allies of the U.S. These allies are Saudi Arabia, the headquarters of the IINA, Egypt, Kuwait, Pakistan, Morocco and Qatar (SUSRIS 2010). It shows that these countries are in a favor of the U.S. foreign policy and keep their political relations on a cooperative level. Thus, there are more or less strong political bonds between the U.S and the OIC members. Therefore, it is expected that the IINA news stories mirror these positive political relations.

After having investigated the institutional background of this agency, eventually it seems that the news story by IINA is not so ideologically balanced, as was stated in the structural part of the analysis. Although the agency particularly serves members of the

Islamic organization, no anti-American mood has been indicated. On the contrary, the news story mentions that both American political parties praised the U.S. intelligence, armed forces and Obama for the U.S. operation as well. Moreover, president Barack Obama is also frequently quoted as saying that “bin Laden's demise should be welcomed by all who believe in peace and human dignity.” This indicates that the agency probably approves of the this military operation.

A member of the OIC and ally of the U.S., Pakistan, is in focus too. According to the IINA coverage, the United States is concerned about the fact that Osama bin Laden was inside Pakistan. In addition, the most powerful Pakistani intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence, is suspected by U.S. officials of maintaining links to extremist groups close to al-Qaeda. As Pakistan is the member of the OIC, one would expect that any connections to al-Qaeda were refuted or considered unproven by IINA. Nonetheless, it is apparent that there is no such intention.

### **The Muslim Observer**

The Muslim Observer (MO) is a weekly newspaper concentrating on issues relevant to Muslims and Islam. It is operating from Farmington, Michigan and it has branches across the United States. The paper claims a circulation of 20,000 and readers in all 50 states; it distributes free copies at mosques and cultural centers. The MO began its journey into the media world in 1999 as an alternative to the corporate media on issues pertaining to Islam and Muslims. Since then it has focused on American Muslims: their issues, perspectives, and concerns. The MO is the oldest of the branches of Muslim Media Network, Inc. (MMN), which came into existence and subsumed it in 2005. MMN also operates a Web site, muslimobserver.com, and contains the Muslim Media News Service

(MMNS), a subscription news service with national and international reporters (Muslim Observer 2011). MMNS offers a growing Muslim alternative to existing international wire services (Reuters, UPI, AP) on matters pertaining to Islam and Muslim.

According to its official website, the MMN's goal is to offer a balanced and fearless forum to those alternative voices that find no space in the existing U.S. mass media. It intends to achieve this mission by promoting genuine and authentic dialog between emerging Muslim voices and the audiences on issues of national and international importance. Also, MMN, Inc. “intends to make its mission relevant to all people. (Muslim Observer 2011).

On the grounds of what has been mentioned, the Muslim Observer serves the Muslim minority in the U.S. and offers a different view of events than the mainstream American media. Hence, it is expected that the news stories produced by this newspaper tries to shed better light on Islam and Muslims. In addition, they might also disapprove of generally accepted attitudes of the American public towards the Islamic world; and to disapprove of widespread opinions thus means to oppose the ideology of the American nation.

The Muslim Observer news story itself proves the anti-U.S. attitude of the agency. While the rest of news stories (AP, Chicago Sun-Times, IINA) express their straightforward approval of the death of bin Laden, the MO considers it an extra-judicial execution. In addition, it focuses on the question whether the operation was in accordance with the international law, Vienna and Geneva conventions. The U.S. is portrayed as the “state of disregard for the law and justice which filters all the way down from the White House.” It is apparent that the MO tries to vilify the U.S. administration and president Obama for the way of performing their foreign policy.

## 7 News Comprehension

The comprehension of news is another crucial component of news analysis. This chapter, therefore, focuses on possible processes of news understanding by the reader of the news about the death of Osama bin Laden. As this paper deals with the news that come from the American and Islamic sources, the interpretation of the news will be also analyzed as if they were read by readers coming from these two backgrounds, American and Islamic. The theories of comprehension process by Marshall McLuhan and Umberto Eco, which are stated in the theoretical part of this paper, are applied in this analysis.

According to the theory of medium by McLuhan, the medium is the message. Hence, it is relevant to realize what the medium and the message is in our case. One medium which is used by the reader is the Internet providing him with the news on bin Laden's death. Therefore, we could say that the message of the medium is the content of the news that we read, however, McLuhan warns that we are often distracted by the content of a medium, which, in almost all cases, is another distinct medium in itself. He says that "it is too typical that the content of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium"(McLuhan 1995, 150). Hence, the content of the Internet, the news, is actually another medium that blinds one to the real message of the Internet.

As McLuhan says, a message is the change of pattern that the medium brings to our everyday lives. Thus, the message of the Internet is not the information or data that one obtains, but rather the change in communication among people which Internet introduced. Yet, the Internet is not the medium that plays the main role in the comprehension process, but it is a news story, the content of the Internet, that influences readers with its message. The message of the news about the death of the leader of al-Qaeda is not the news story

itself, but a change of attitude of American or Muslim readers towards the U.S. operation. On that account, to understand the message of the news story (medium) properly, it is needed to look beyond the obvious and search for the effects that the news story has on its readers (McLuhan 1995, 150). To illustrate this process, we will focus on a message of one of the four news stories. It is the coverage by the Associated Press called Obama in NY: We never forget, we mean what we say. The news story reminds readers of the September 11 terror attacks, the number of casualties and what a tragic day it was for the American nation. Barack Obama is portrayed here as a messenger of good news informing people that U.S. that the most infamous U.S. enemy is dead. Obama adds that finally justice was done and that the American pursuit of the terrorist leader sent a message around the world that the U.S. never forget what they say. As has been mention, to uncover the message of the news story (our medium), it is crucial not only to read the story itself but also to look behind it and realize how much it alters our personal attitude and current opinion of this issue. It is the effect of the news itself that is the real message. On the basis of McLuhan theory, no matter whether the reader is an American or Muslim, the story always changes his experience up to now. Therefore, the message of the story might make the reader proud of the United States and Barack Obama for the successful operation that killed bin Laden or, on the contrary, it might persuade the reader that the U.S. wanted to take just a bloody revenge for the victims of the September 11 and that their manners are no better than the ones of al Qaeda.

As McLuhan says, the medium and its message changes the reader, their social patterns and every aspect of their personal life (1967, 8). In contrast, Umberto Eco opposes this assertion and claims that it is not so easy to influence the receiver by the message owing to the reader's freedom to interpret it in a different way. The reader that receives the



message, which is the empty form, can attribute various meanings to it depending on the Code that he applies to it (Eco 1995, 139). If the theory is applied to our case, it means that the Code used by the American and Islamic readers in the interpretation of the same news stories differ, hence the news comprehension varies as well. The matter is that the variability of interpretations of the news stories on the killing of Osama bin Laden brings also the variability of views on the issue. The Code that American and Muslim readers use depends on plenty of things, such as their social situation, previous education, cultural context, mood of the moment, etc.

Since there is no regulation of the interpretation process, there is a risk of misinterpretation of the news story. To illustrate, an American reader comes across one of the Islamic news stories that was written in the Code of the Islamic values. But the message of the story is set out from the original Source, the Islamic world, and it arrives in the sociological situation of the U.S, where a different code operates. Thus the American reader applying his Code, which is based on the different ideological values, can easily misunderstand the original message of the news story.

To prove this point, we focus on the news story by the Muslim Observer representing the Islamic view. The operation of the U.S. forces against Osama bin Laden is pictured here as an execution performed with a total disregard for international law and Geneva conventions. It opposes also Obama's claim that justice was done with the death of bin Laden. According to the Muslim Observer, real justice would have included an arrest, a trial and a sentence in an international court and it would not have involved shooting an unarmed man in front of his wife and children. If read by an American, his Code based on his cultural and historical context influences his final comprehension of the story. Then, what is expected is that this American reader would strongly disagree with these

statements about the U.S. operation because his ideological knowledge is not in accordance with the Code in which the story is written. In other words, the American reader believes that Osama bin Laden was a terrorist that killed thousands of innocent people and a man that did not deserve to live for what he had done. Therefore, bin Laden's death, no matter if it was in accordance of international law or not, brought him a relief. Hence, by not accepting the message of this news story (medium), the reader do not let the medium change his views and attitude towards this issue, and then the medium does not have any power over him.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to conduct a comparative media analysis that deals with the representation of the U.S. president Barack Obama in the American and Islamic news media. Obama's news representation has been analyzed in the context of the a significant world and media event: the death of Osama bin Laden. The analyzed news stories produced by Islamic and American news agencies and published on their news servers were examined in accordance with the critical discourse analysis. This discourse analysis helped me to unveil the possible ideologically-based differences in the representations of Barack Obama.

The first phase of the media analysis deals the thematic (topical) structures of the news stories. Concerning the topical structures, the news stories about the death of Osama bin Laden are not fundamentally different in the American and Islamic news. The overall macroproportion “The death of Osama bin Laden” dominates in all thematic structures of the news items. Nevertheless, all headlines and leads mention president Barack Obama, which indicates the importance of this news actor in the event. Minor topical differences are indicated in the order of context and consequences of the event. Quantitatively, the differences are far from substantial. However, the stylistic and rhetoric structures reveal first differences in the representation of Obama.

The lexical style of news stories by the Associated Press, Chicago Sun-Times and IINA are standardized and in accordance with the formal style and political jargon. The choice of words indicates the ideological approval of the U.S. and the political strategy of Barack Obama. These stories also contain the rhetorical devices, such as quotations, concrete details about the event or appeal to emotions, which significantly increase the

credibility of news event and the news actor, Barack Obama. On the contrary, the lexical style of the news story published by the Muslim Observer mirrors a strong disagreement with the way of killing bin Laden and the American political ideology in general. The persuasive effectiveness of the story is boosted by the use of numbers, quotations or reliable sources that enhance the negative representation of Obama.

The analysis production processes unveiled why the news stories represented Barack Obama in the way they did. Since the institutional background of the AP highly supports the ideology of elite press of the U.S. and thus mirrors the social representation, that is the social representation of the major social classes, Barack Obama is portrayed as a national hero who successfully finished the manhunt for the most wanted American enemy. Although the Chicago Sun-Times is not a national but a local newspaper, the institutional background reveals Obama's political connections to the elite groups in the city of Chicago. The Obama's positive image in the news story can also be accounted to the voter's support that he has in this area. Since the International Islamic News Agency serves mainly to the members of the most Islamic organization in the world, one would expect that there is no reason for the ideological approval of the U.S. operation. However, the United States are in a close political co-operation with the Islamic countries that fund this organization. Therefore, Barack Obama's representation in the IINA proves these positive foreign relations. Finally, the power of institution behind the news text equally applies also to the Muslim Observer. Behind this Islamic paper stands a community of Muslims that opposes the mainstream media of the U.S. and tends to give alternative views of the world events. Nevertheless, however alternative the view of Barack Obama and the death of bin Laden is in their news story, it is greatly anti-U.S. based, which is also reflected in a very negative representation of the American president.

In conclusion, we can see that the ideology, in the news discourse plays an important role in the representation of the American president, Barack Obama. The prevailing ideology, which can be either implicit or explicit in the news story, mainly reflects the interests of elites that control the institutional background of the specific news agency. No matter the agency is based in the Islamic world or in the United States of America, the representation is always influenced by the institutional constraints that are cognitively stored by journalists who also act within them.

At the beginning of the paper it was suggested that the American news media would represent Barack Obama more positively than the Islamic news media. Indeed, the American news stories by the Associated press and Chicago Sun-Times portray the U.S. president in a way that is ideologically pro-Obama. Even though the news items by both the International Islamic News Agency and Muslim Observer were supposed to represent Obama in a rather unflattering and negative way, this was proven only with the news coverage by the Muslim Observer. The news item by IINA, on the contrary, expresses the positive and ideologically approving representation of Obama.

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